

Teachers just can't stay away, donating their time at schools

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June, July and August are months most teachers can call their own, with time to pursue endeavors away from the classroom. The same can be said about their students, whose summer plans usually do not include books and homework.

But this summer, a number of teachers are returning to the classroom on a volunteer basis to try to help students keep their minds and skills sharp over the long vacation.

Although the atmosphere might be more casual and relaxed than during the regular school year, there is serious work going on in these programs.

Teachers in two elementary schools in the Coatesville Area School District, for example, are donating their time this summer as tutors and mentors.

Four teachers at Caln Elementary School in Thorndale will work with six students for one morning a week. Although the focus is on schoolwork, there will also be mini field trips for enrichment.

"This is the first year we are doing this," said first-grade teacher Pam Freilich. "The purpose is to keep these kids strong throughout the summer."

But for Freilich, there are benefits for herself as well.

"When I left school for summer vacation last year, I found I really missed my classroom and the students," she said. "I feel we are doing this as a service and frankly, I wish I could do more."

Freilich credits Caln principal Elberta Hopkins and school guidance counselor Sandy Tucker for their help in getting the new program off the ground. Also helping out are Tina Stuber, a first-grade teacher, and Beth Mendenhall, a special education teacher.

"We saw a need," Tucker said, and "the parents agreed that this would be good for their children."

Also at Caln, two fifth-grade teachers, Veronica Rainer and Tracy Gomez, have initiated a mentor pro-

gram where they each "adopt" a student for a year, beginning this summer. "We have met with the parents of each child, and we should start very soon with spending about three to six hours a week with them," Rainer said.

Rainer likened their efforts to a Big Sister program.

"What we are trying to be is provide a positive role model for the child through interaction," Rainer said. The teachers said they planned to share their family activities with the children, including church and vacations.

Kathleen Hood, principal at Carl Benner Elementary School in Coatesville, is also proud of her teachers' efforts to maintain a summer connection between school and student.

This will be the second summer teachers have been involved in a summer mentor program.

"I have eight teachers who will be volunteering their time the entire summer to work with about 15 students," Hood said.

Reading specialist Margaret Pearsall, who

is one of the summer mentors, said this is an effort to develop more personal relationships with students.

"Over the course of the summer, we will try to make things fun for the kids," she said.

Although the students might be treated to trips to the mall and lunch, there will be, Pearsall assured, many trips to the local library.

In the Downingtown Area School District, music teacher Judy Houdeschel will offer six weeks of free, weekly lessons to her students at Bradford Heights and East Ward Elementary Schools.

This is Houdeschel's second year of giving summer lessons.

"It's been fairly successful," Houdeschel said. "I'd say of my 200 students, about 100 came last summer for the lessons."

To keep students interested in picking up their saxophone or trumpet over the summer, Houdeschel said, she picks music that students can identify with.

"I use Disney tunes over the summer," she said. "This is more having

fun making music as opposed to instruction. There are no practice cards or grades. Just a relaxed atmosphere to have some fun with music."

"Plus," she added, with a smile, "if they like it, they will practice more."

One parent who is pleased her children have had a chance to experience a summer music session is Kathi Marsilio, whose children attend Bradford Heights.

"Judy is very encouraging to her students and a wonderful teacher," Marsilio said. "A program like this helps to keep the kids interested to music over the summer."

In the Owen J. Roberts School District, this summer will be the third for a Free Enrichment Summer School Program for students grades six to 12. The program is run by staff and community volunteers.

C. Ruth Parke, a first-grade teacher at French Creek Elementary School, will for the first time offer a one-week course titled "Creative Expression and Drama."

"I'm very excited about this," Parke said. "We have many talented students out here, and I'm hoping to get kids interested in theater."

Parke is no stranger to volunteering her time in the summer.

For the last 10 years, Parke and other teachers in the district have been involved in the Summer Activities Program, which offers 32 workshops to all elementary school-age students in the district from 9 to 11 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in July.

Workshop topics include designing T-shirts, making dioramas and playing games.

Parke said the schools' Parent-Teacher Organizations donate materials for the workshops, and money paid by the parents is used by the teachers to pay for juice and snacks for the students.

"I've been teaching a long time," Parke said. "But I have found that I gain so much from the students through interacting with them outside the regular classroom experience."

Parke said she liked summer programs because the emphasis is more on fun.

"It's good for young people to have positive experience with adults," she said. "We can teach them about who they are."